Moving Forward

For residents of Wilmington who were not members of the White Government Union, Red Shirt brigade, or the Democratic Party, recovery from the 1898 election campaign and violence was difficult. Most of these men and women, primarily African Americans, maintained a tenuous existence as wage earners in the households or on the docks of white employers. Upper-class African American families maintained their property ownership, but their sons and daughters began to move away from the city.[74]

Former Democrats who had switched to Fusion tried to salvage their political and social standing. Frank Dempsey, a white man, was forced to resign his position on the New Hanover County Board of Education and later wrote in the papers that he would not "be led off as [he] was before by designing men and intend not to serve in any office in which a negro [was] with [him] in said office." Wilmington grew increasingly hostile to white non-Democrats, and many men sought to make peace with the new Democratic power brokers or—like W. J. Harris and L. H. Bryant—to simply leave the city because of hostilities. [75] The Democratic Party also tried to keep other people under its thumb. When a rumor circulated that President McKinley planed to return George French to the city as postmaster, local businessmen sent a petition to McKinley—"Mr. French has rendered himself peculiarly obnoxious to the citizens here, and his presence . . . would roughly jar the peace . . . that now possesses the community." They also threatened French, who, they contended, was "sufficiently aware of the temper of the white people of Wilmington to know that it would not do for him to return to this city even with a United States commission in his pocket." [76]

The "negro problem" continued even after the disfranchisement amendment was ratified. Many felt the answer to the "question" was two-fold—disfranchisement and proper education. Some white educators such as Charles L. Coon attempted to provide what they deemed a proper education for blacks—primarily the training to be good workers. Reflecting the sentiment in newspapers and intellectual discussions in both black and white circles, John J. Blair, white superintendent of New Hanover County schools in 1905, believed that the "solution of the race problem" was in the proper education of African American boys and girls. He thought black education should teach a student "how to live and how to labor … to sustain himself and aid others, to gain from his books a reasonable amount of learning and receive lasting lessons in morals and manners." [77] Conversely, men such as Alfred Moore Waddell thought that whites should quit trying to educate blacks because it would not solve "social and political evils." Such men who became known as exclusionists pointed out the failure of black education—for it made blacks more assertive. They perceived that new generations of blacks were not complacent but instead were "indifferent, unreliable, untrained, and indolent" as a result of an educational system that promoted equal education for both races. [78]

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[74] For a good overview of Wilmington's African American community, see Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle*.

[75] For articles demonstrating how Wilmington's climate changed for non-Democrats, see the *Morning Star* (Wilmington), November 16, 17, 1898, and the *Wilmington Messenger,* November 16 – December 7, 1898. *Contested Election Case,* 387, 394.

[76] *Wilmington Messenger* August 1, 1899; *Morning Star* (Wilmington), August 3, 1899; McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 790.

[77] Blair quoted from *Wilmington Messenger*, June 7, 1905 as found in Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle,* 154.

[78] Waddell as quoted in Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 177-8.